



Inspiration Point

A new School of Law program points student leaders in the right directions.

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For the School of Law, educating students through a rigorous classroom curriculum is not enough, nor is letting students behave like lawyers in a comprehensive experiential program. The School seeks to nurture the next generation of lawyers to be effective leaders in the legal field and in their communities. Thus, the Student Leadership Program was born.

One of Dean Karen H. Rothenberg's visions for the School is for the student

organizations to be successful partners. Just as the law school takes a holistic approach to educating students, "I took a holistic approach in my dreams for the School of Law. Having key student organizations work together with a common mindset is part of the culture of interdependence I want to promote and motivate."

The Office of Student Affairs, under the leadership of Tricia O'Neill '87, assistant dean, and Jennifer DiSanza, director, fostered Rothenberg's two objectives: to develop leadership skills and to provide tools to

run an effective organization.

DiSanza, a third-year evening student whose background is in training and development, met with O'Neill to determine the focus of the program and the needs of the organizations. "We determined student needs based on years of working closely with our student body to help them plan and execute events," O'Neill explains. "We

Bar Association, Mary Schaefer found the program an invaluable opportunity for leaders of the various organizations to reflect on past leadership goals and to anticipate what goals they might set for the future. Specifically, she explains about an ongoing debate within the student community centering on allocating funds to organizations.

"Money given to one organization means money taken from another. Not surprisingly, this leads to a great deal of tension," Schaefer explains. The program allowed Schaefer to discuss with other leaders, in an organized format, their common goals in order to pool resources and accomplish some things they otherwise could not afford. As a result, several organizations have done just that. In October, student

successfully form an active group of students with similar interests within the microcosm (and somewhat political atmosphere) of the law school."

Wherley continues her critique of the program by recognizing that all the presenters and training were excellent. In the midst of practical tips on whom to e-mail or where to have copies made, to more abstract

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wanted to focus on giving them the essentials they needed so that they could plan and conduct organizational meetings, events and other activities in a manner befitting students in professional school and in a way that allowed the students' activities to be fully integrated into the mission of the School of Law," O'Neill continues. The two developed an agenda for what would become two half-day programs offered on Aug. 26 and Sept. 17, 2000.

The 46 students who attended the sessions, facilitated by DiSanza, received initial training in understanding leadership skills, how groups work together, followed by two break-out sessions focusing on how organizations can work with the School and how to run an effective meeting. Aside from O'Neill, Deans José Bahamonde-González and Jana Singer and Director of Business and Finance Andreas Ortmeyer gave various presentations. Jason St. John '00 spoke on "How to Run an Effective Meeting."

As president of the second-year day class and vice president for the Student Women's

groups donated funds and resources to sponsor a death penalty forum on campus. "It was quite impressive to see the student leaders putting their skills to work so quickly after the program," notes Schaefer.

O'Neill is quick to add, "Some of the students—at the sessions—seemed to think, 'well that is just common sense' or 'sure I knew that.' The value has played out in the actual doing: This event and two others that the students coordinated and planned are where the knowledge and training is put into practice."

From approximately 30 existing organizations, the 46-student turnout was a "huge success," states DiSanza. Primarily, attendees were presidents of organizations and class presidents.

Robin Wherley, a second-year day student, found the Student Leadership Program timely. She had just decided to revive the Criminal Law Association, which had been inactive for more than a year. Though she held leadership positions in the "real world," she states, "I had no idea how to

concepts like motivating members and developing a successful leadership style, Wherley enjoyed most "meeting other students who worked in student groups and hearing about their experiences."

Based on this year's success, the fledgling program will mature to an annual program for all new leaders of student organizations. DiSanza further envisions specialized modules in areas such as diversity and conflict management offered throughout the year. Another outgrowth of the half-day sessions, is a manual compiled and written by DiSanza. "It's a reference guide for every law school organization on campus, containing the nuts and bolts of the program," DiSanza explains. "From how to start an organization, to where to go for speakers, to catering—it's all in one place." The manual, which is approximately 40 pages including appendices, contains contact information for each existing organization, forms, policies, and pertinent Web addresses.